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INTEGRATION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Written statement* submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[19 January 2002]

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*This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Violence against women in Sudan

Society for Threatened Peoples expresses its deep concern at the impact of the ongoing armed conflict in Sudan on the situation of human rights and its adverse effects on the civilian population, in particular women and children. In the oilfields of Sudan thousands of women have been killed or displaced, their villages burned to the ground. The Government of Sudan seems to regard the civilian population not as citizens but as a security risk and potential supporters of armed resistance movements. By committing massive human rights violations the Government of Sudan ensures a safe way for oil companies to exploit the natural resources of the country. The Government of Sudan has increased its support for pro-government militias and its direct military activities near the oilfields in the province of Western Upper Nile to ensure its control of roads, airstrips, villages and facilities of the oil industry. The growing importance of oil in the war economy has provoked attacks on oil installations by anti-government forces and further military activity on all sides. Pro-government and anti-government forces in conflict with one another have burned and looted villages in all areas of Western Upper Nile. Oil companies are directly or indirectly assisting the Sudanese Army by allowing the use of vehicles, roads, airstrips and other facilities for military purposes.

Defecting soldiers of the Sudanese Army testified that they had been ordered to participate in attacks on non-government controlled settlements. These helicopter attacks were part of a government strategy to force the inhabitants out of the area. The soldiers reported that they had been instructed to kill civilians and any persons believed to be not loyal to the authorities in order to ensure the oil production. Thousands of Southern Sudanese women have been forced to leave their homes and became dependent on international humanitarian aid. The forced displacement has been severely disruptive to the economy of Western Upper Nile. The destruction of their homes, the looting of livestock and loss of grain reserves make survival in the conflict-affected areas extremely difficult for the agro-pastoral Southern Sudanese population.

The armed conflict has greatly affected the lives of women and completely changed their role in the family and the community. The breakdown and disintegration of family and community networks has forced women to assume new roles. A large number of female-headed households has been created where the men have been displaced, detained, have disappeared or are dead. Women invariably have to bear greater responsibility for their children and their elderly relatives when the men in the family have gone. The absence of the men heightens the insecurity and danger for the women and accelerates the breakdown of the traditional protection and support mechanisms upon which the women have previously relied. Many women are fleeing due to increased insecurity. Women became heads of households and breadwinners, taking over the responsibility for earning a livelihood, caring for animals and being active outside the home. Women have to fight more to get jobs and enough money which leads to a growing migration towards the cities where women are trying to do business in the markets. Women whose husbands have disappeared experience many of the same problems as widows, but without official recognition of their status. Furthermore they are suffering from the psychological effects and insecurity because the fate of their husbands is unknown.

We are calling on the United Nations Commission on Human Rights to condemn the human rights violations in the oil-region of Sudan and urge the Government of Sudan to immediately open the area to humanitarian and human rights organisations. The Sudanese authorities should be urged to suspend their oil production until a just and lasting peace has been agreed in Sudan and until the victims of forced displacements have safely returned to their places of

origin. All conflict parties should be urged to respect and protect human rights, international humanitarian law and fundamental freedoms.

We are extremely worried about the ongoing bombardement of schools, markets, emergency-feeding centres, churches and airstrips by the Sudanese Airforce in conflict areas in Sudan. The deliberate bombardement of civilian targets has been deeply deteriorating the situation of women in Sudan and violates basic human rights principles and international conventions to protect the civilian population during war.

We are appealing to the honourable Commission once again to call upon the Government of Sudan to finally sign and ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.